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Review of Yiannos Katsourides', History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left

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Hatzivassiliou's book makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of essential features and complex interactions within Nato policy debates. Based on exhaustive research in the relevant Nato archives, it reveals a lively debate on both the institutionalisation of the alliance and its role as a global, and not only a European, security player. In the Cold War of geopolitics and ideology, the legitimacy and political cohesion of the alliance was perhaps as crucial as military strength. The study includes a select bibliography providing the necessary political/historical context.

NOTE

- 1 Morton A. Kaplan, *System and process in international politics* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015), 48.

Yiannos Katsourides

History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left

London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014. 266 pp.

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Yiannos Katsourides' *History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left* begins with a simple goal: to examine the establishment and development of the Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK, 1922–1944), namely a formation that preceded, played a decisive role in setting up, and eventually merged with the Progressive Party of Working People (Akel, 1941–), arguably the electorally most successful communist party in Europe. In its 266 pages, the book exceeds its stated objective by making at least three additional and important contributions: it provides a clear survey of the island's socio-economic situation in the interwar period, tying up the fragmentary references in the existing literature; it offers a contextualised analysis of party formation in Cyprus under British rule; and finally, beyond the historiography of Cyprus, it presents a carefully researched case study of political organisation under the specific circumstances of interwar British imperialism, marked by anticommunism and increasing interference in local social life.

As the author reminds us, there are both epistemological and methodological reasons why the history of Cypriot political parties (and the Cypriot left in particular) has been so little explored. This has to do first with the specific approach marking most studies on Cyprus which,

regardless of their disciplinary background, tend to focus almost exclusively on tracing the origins, development and characteristics of the “Cyprus conflict”, which to this day divides Greek and Turkish Cypriots. It is also, more concretely, the outcome of the loss of most the communist party’s archive, in both its KKK and Akel form. Katsourides skilfully attends to this methodological difficulty by combining evidence drawn from whatever party-related archives remain, British official correspondence, trade union publications, the Greek Cypriot press and, crucially, a set of previously unpublished interviews with some of the communist movement’s main historical actors.

The book’s seven chapters are thematically organised and solidly built on each other. Chapters one and two set the social, economic and institutional background of colonial Cyprus against which the KKK emerged in the early 1920s. Chapter three looks at early forms of popular political mobilisation, contextualising communism as just one of its many attempted enunciations. The last four chapters of the book are focused on the KKK per se throughout the 22 years of its existence (1922–1944) and its eventual transmutation into Akel.

Although it provides a good synthesis of earlier scholarship, the first chapter is perhaps not the most original and occasionally reproduces certain historiographical tropes which are currently being revised. Hence, the author attributes the island’s “late” economic development, one of the “particularities of Cyprus”, to the corrupting influence of a somewhat formulaically represented Ottoman “absolutist past” (17, 35), responsible, it is said, for the functioning of a “feudal regime” (18) in the island (even though feudalism and absolutism are historically mutually exclusive sociopolitical formations), and its stagnation into an archaic agricultural economy.¹ In addition, while

the lack of British involvement in the island’s economic welfare (20) is an attested historical fact, recent studies show that this is not easily imputable to negligence or to a narrow understanding of fiscal orthodoxy on the part of the colonial authorities.² Finally, although it certainly has the merit of clarity, the presentation of the three “cleavages” which are said to structure the Cypriot political landscape during the period under study – ethnic, anticolonial and class-based (37–8, 40) – may appear a little static and their constitution could have been further historicised.

In all fairness, part of this is done in chapter two, which outlines the conditions of political participation in colonial Cyprus as laid down by the British authorities. We are reminded that the latter established elective institutions at the local (village, towns) and central levels and that representatives to these, and particularly the Legislative Council, were elected by two religiously segregated colleges, Christian and Muslim. More importantly, Katsourides explores two political consequences of what is usually only referred to in passing in the historiography of Cyprus; namely, that the political franchise was tied to the payment of one category of property tax. The first such consequence is, of course, that a significant part of the population in that overwhelmingly agricultural island was denied the right to vote. This class of increasingly proletarianised peasants would eventually constitute one of the target constituencies of the KKK, which would provide them the possibility to express themselves politically. The second consequence of this suffrage based on the tax threshold is that the majority of voters, comprised of overindebted peasants, mostly aligned themselves with the Greek nationalist political views of their powerful creditors, the island’s merchant and professional classes and the Orthodox church. Predictably, this led to political rela-

tionships that were largely clientelistic in nature (60) and to a regime that the author persuasively terms “oligarchic” (56–59).

Chapter three turns to the largely untapped political potential of the nonvoting masses, predominantly peasants driven to proletarianisation through the forced sales of mortgaged land. This is a key chapter in that it presents the variety of formations and movements that sought to exploit that political potential. Social banditry was indeed a popular form of pre-communist mobilisation, although the author relies perhaps too much on a now contested Hobsbawmian model in characterising it as “spontaneous outbreaks among the poorer strata, in response to heavy taxation and hardship due to drought” (68); the rather mechanical link established between peasant rebellions and “suffering of one kind or another” has been discredited notably by the Subaltern Studies Group, Ranajit Guha in particular.³ Katsourides shows that members of the ruling elite were among the first to take initiatives to politically organise the paupers and the working class. One key formation here is the Agrarian Party, established by Kyriacos Rossides in 1924. This party defined its agenda beyond the then dominant platform – among Cypriot political leaders – of *enosis* (union with Greece) and instead turned specifically towards the financial, economic and professional concerns of the agriculturalists. It also earnestly sought to forge cross-communitarian links between Greek and Turkish Cypriot workers and peasants. It is in this context of political effervescence that more radical formations emerged, first the Cyprus Labour Party and then, from within its ranks between 1923 and 1926, the KKK (86–91), which relayed its ideas through the dense network of working-class guilds, savings clubs and brotherhoods. Very suggestively, Katsourides mentions that the diffusion of radical ideas was significantly facilitated by the import of

printed material from Athens and Alexandria and the work of refugees from Asia Minor and Thessaloniki (130 and 85, respectively).

The four last chapters of the book, ostensibly devoted to the KKK, offer in fact a rich variety of vistas and angles of approach to the general political history of the island under British rule. Although the KKK was able to exploit the split between the uncompromising (*adiallaktoi*) and the gradualist (*diallaktikoi*) wings of the Greek nationalist movement (92), it did not manage to become a mass movement. Indeed the party remained at the time too sectarian (95) and faced well-established and entrenched adversaries, particularly the Orthodox church (104). In addition much of the items on its agenda (extending suffrage to women or redistributing the large church estates) may have shocked contemporary views and certainly antagonised the ruling elite (108–10), who did not shy away from using underlings to exert violence on known or suspected communists (159–60). Katsourides notes the relative failure of the KKK to enlist active Turkish Cypriot support in spite of earnest efforts deployed in this respect (119–20) and the party’s explicit rejection of nationalism, which it presented as a diversion from the actual problems affecting the working class.

The seventh, final chapter of the book is also when this study “takes off”, to paraphrase the author. This explores the 1930s to early 1940s, a period in which the KKK, a small and radical formation, morphed under conditions of illegality into the mass party Akel. After the October 1931 riots, the party was declared illegal and the colonial administration implemented a series of repressive measures such as press censorship, the prohibition of non-officially authorised assemblies and the abolition of all elective institutions. Much of the analysis in this chapter, then, focuses on how the clandestine

party sought and managed to expand its social outreach and eventual constituency by infiltrating, organising and leading the exploding trade union movement. One of the key claims of the book is indeed to evince how in Cyprus, in opposition to other European experiences, the creation of a communist party preceded that of the trade unions rather than emerged from within their ranks (69, 90, 130, 145, 180–184). During that time, the moderating influence of London-based Cypriot communists, who tagged along with the Comintern-sanctioned “popular strategy”, induced the party to adopt a less dogmatic stance, which increased its outreach among the middle class. When the Second World War began, and the colonial authorities – in an effort to bolster their loyalty – allowed Cypriots to establish political parties, many of the increasingly reformist rather than revolutionary ideas advocated by the KKK had earned the approval of a wide cross-section of the local population. This explains that soon after its founding congress in 1941, Akel, although captained by communists, quickly became a mass party, eventually forcing the KKK to dissolve in 1944. While the author confirms the correlation between Akel’s massification and its eventual adoption of *enosis* (190, 192) as one of its goals, he sophisticatedly points out that the union with Greece envisioned by Cypriot communists had little to do with the one wished for by the nationalists; the former were indeed hopeful that after the war communists would prevail and become the dominant force in mainland Greece (194).

Perhaps the most important contribution of Katsourides’ work as far as the historiography of Cyprus is concerned is the argument that the emergence, organisation and operation of the KKK completely transformed the island’s political landscape. Through emulation, opposition and the mere challenge it represented, the KKK compelled other forces – and particularly the

conservatives – to shed their erstwhile clientelistic paternalism, organise themselves into parties and develop their own ancillary formations and trade unions (162–3, 168, 197).

One criticism that may be levelled at this study is that of its certain overreliance on its theoretical framework, which is resolutely anchored in comparative politics and political sociology and mostly informed by the works of Stein Rokkan, Seymour Martin Lipset as well as the “Marxist literature on class movements and parties” (4). The most important problem this raises is that of a certain ossification of the concepts used by the author. It is not always easy, indeed, to disentangle “analytical” from “lay” categories or, to put it differently, the author’s own concepts from the historical actors’ categories of self-representation.⁴ A characteristic – and crucial – example here is the notion of “working class”, as when the author writes that “the Cypriot working class in the early twentieth century lacked class consciousness. Besides lack of education and cultural sensitivity, the heterogeneous composition of the working class also inhibited collective class consciousness” (33). What are the grounds on which the existence of this “working class” is to be established if it lacked the (Marxist) “consciousness” to claim that designation for itself and if it was too heterogeneous to allow the scholar to do so? In a colonial setting, words are war, they are a claim to existence and much of the effort of communists throughout the interwar period would precisely consist in imposing and legitimising a terminology heretofore little used or deliberately shunned in the Cypriot public sphere. Katsourides nods in this direction when he refers to the importance of the various communist newspapers and the efforts made by militants to make them available throughout the island; or when he mentions the “tavern”, a “meeting point for discussions.” Pursued further, such insights inspired by cul-

tural history of the Thompsonian kind would have shown us better how workers in Cyprus began to think of themselves, under the guidance of communists, as members of “the working class”.

Theory, however, never burdens the flow of this very well-written book. The narrative remains at all times engaging while the transitions from chapter to chapter and section to section are always fluid. In concluding this review, it must be stressed that Katsourides’ work is important not only for the historiography of Cyprus, but also and more broadly, through the clear case study it analyses, to colonial studies and, more specifically, political mobilisation under European colonial rule.

NOTES

- 1 For more dynamic representations of Ottoman Cyprus, see Marc Aymes, *A provincial history of the Ottoman empire: Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean in the nineteenth century* (London: Routledge, 2013) and Antonis Hadjikyriacou, “Society and economy on an Ottoman island: Cyprus in the eighteenth century” (PhD diss., University of London, 2011).
- 2 Diana Markides, *Sendall in Cyprus, 1892–1898: a governor in bondage* (Nicosia: Moufflon, 2014).
- 3 Ranajit Guha, “The prose of counter-insurgency,” in *Selected subaltern studies*, eds Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 45–87 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45, 47.
- 4 Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker, “Beyond identity,” *Theory and Society* 29/1 (2000): 1–47.

Fatih Ermiş

A History of Ottoman Economic Thought: Developments Before the Nineteenth Century

London: Routledge, 2014. xiv + 212 pp.

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In recent decades, one may say that the historiography of the Ottoman empire has embarked in new directions and unexplored fields, from consumption studies to *histoire des mentalités*. One area that has remained somehow underdeveloped is the history of ideas or, as it is now more fashionable to say, intellectual history. With the possible exception of the history of political thought, which has seen some valuable contributions recently, Ottoman philosophical, theological and even scientific ideas are still relatively unknown. Apart from a few pioneering articles, such as Halil İnalcık’s famous discussion of the “Ottoman economic mind” or Metin Kunt’s seminal paper on the views of the historian Na’ima on elite entrepreneurship (and also a few of books in Turkish),¹ Fatih Ermiş’ book is the first in a non-Turkish language to examine Ottoman economic thought in a comprehensive way. As such, it is a more than welcome contribution to Ottoman studies.

The book in question is divided into six chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction (chapter one), the author sets out to describe his approach; after discussing the various definitions of economics and the possibility of their application in the Ottoman case (here one should note that Ermiş’ effort to approach his subject “from within” is commend-